



LOCAL 1664

Montgomery County Career Fire Fighters Ass'n., Inc.

July 8, 2008

Public Hearing – Bill 25-08
Emergency Medical Services Transport Fee
John J. Sparks, President
Montgomery County Career Fire Fighters Association

The Montgomery County Career Fire Fighters Association, IAFF Local 1664 represents over 1100 professional fire fighters and paramedics who provide emergency and non-emergency services to the citizens of Montgomery County 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

I am here tonight asking the County Council for your support for Bill 25-08. Bill 25-08 would put into place a transport user fee that every other major jurisdiction in the Washington, D.C. area has already implemented. The revenue collected from the transport fee would be used for the purpose of enhancing the quality and effectiveness of our fire and rescue services.

In 2004, then County Executive Doug Duncan asked the County Council to pass legislation that would have created the transport fee. The legislation was not passed. Some of the Council members that voted against that legislation, known as Bill 32-04 stated that they would fund the fire/rescue service to the level that was needed. This included 4 person staffing, new apparatus, maintenance, new stations and the Collective Bargaining Agreements. They didn't need an ambulance transport fee to help fund these initiatives.

Well, times have certainly changed in 4 years. With the declining economy 4 person staffing has been delayed and delayed, even though the additional staffing is crucial for the safety of fire fighters and to the enhancement of EMS and fire service to the residents of Montgomery County. New stations will open up with a reduction in apparatus because we can't afford staffing costs. We are in need of implementing an Apparatus Management Plan and the State required Electronic Patient Care Reporting System. Additionally, in the just concluded budget session the Collective Bargaining Agreements came under attack which resulted in an \$8,000,000 reduction in personnel costs to the County Executive's budget along with another \$8,000,000 reduction to the school system budget.

Most County residents are probably already paying for emergency medical transport services in their health insurance coverage. They receive no discount or refund even though they pay for a coverage they cannot use in their own County. In effect, the County is leaving this money that its residents have already paid "on the table". These same residents are double-billed to pay for the service via their County taxes, while all

our neighboring counties recoup their costs from insurers and use it to fund their EMS/fire services. As a result, some residents are paying twice and are contributing to insurance company profits and or reserves. In this era of tight budgets, we should not forego this funding system.

For those of you that believe the myth that injured or sick people will not call 911 because of the "transport fee", you only need to look at the hospital bills that these patients will receive after they arrive at the hospital and are cared for. Those bills will far exceed any "transport fee" billing statement, and yet EMS calls are going up year after year.

I'll close with the following, four years ago then County Council member Tom Perez asked a question to those that opposed the transport fee; "if this is so bad, why is everybody else already doing it?" He received no reply.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in regards to Bill 25-08.